**Focusing on Claims: Plus/Minus/Interesting**

Claims should be both defensible and debatable. The authors of the *Oh, Yeah!* text point out that students do pretty well developing defensible claims, but they tend to take safe positions and argue the obvious. The following activity helps students make claims that are debatable.

PMI (Plus/Minus/Interesting) was developed by Edward de Bono. The PMI lesson calls for students to practice listing all of the possible pluses of a proposed policy, all of the potential minuses, and any consequences that may occur that can’t be placed easily in the plus and minus categories.

De Bono suggests that students begin with fanciful policies (e.g., people should be required to wear a visible display of the mood they’re in) so they don’t have any preconceived opinions. Give students, individually or in pairs, two minute time limits for each category. After a couple of silly policies, then turn to more serious ones, perhaps PMIs on school policies. After this preparation, students can do a PMI on their own claims.

If a claim doesn’t have a number of pluses, then it isn’t defensible. If it doesn’t have at least some minuses, then it isn’t debatable.

An additional benefit of this activity is that it allows students to anticipate and resond to potential objections. A variation of the activity is to have students create plus and minus lists from different perspectives. For example, in developing PMIs for the proposal that high school graduates perform a year of service, students could write from the point of view of the college, the parent of a graduate, a graduate from poverty.

from Smith, Michael, Jeffrey Wilhelm, and James Fredricksen. 2012. *Oh Yeah!: Putting Argument to Work Both in School and Out.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. pp. 55-57.